

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-07

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PA-02 RSC-01 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-02 /041 R

DRAFTED BY AF/E:GDKULICK:JR

APPROVED BY AF/E:WBCOOTE

AF/P:MR. LINEHAN (INFO)

----- 113087

R 242237Z OCT 74

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

UNCLAS STATE 234846

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAID, ET

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE ON DROUGHT RELIEF

OCTOBER 24, 1974

REF: ADDIS ABABA 12607

1. POST RAN LENGTHY OTTAWA ARTICLE ENTITLED, "ETHIOPIA,
RELIEF UNITS DIFFER OVER DROUGHT". ARTICLE GOES OVER
MUCH OF GROUND COVERED REFTEL. SALIENT PASSAGES FOLLOW.

QUOTE: ADDIS ABABA OCT.23 - A MAJOR CONTROVERSY HAS
ERUPTED BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND INTERNATIONAL RELIEF
DONORS OVER WHETHER THERE IS A WORSENING DROUGHT HERE AND
OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S REQUEST FOR NEARLY 280,000 TONS
OF GRAIN IN THE COMING YEAR.

WE KNOW A CRISIS IS AROUND THE CORNER AND I DON'T WANT
TO WAIT UNTIL IT IS HERE, SIAD SHIMELIS ADUGNA,
COMMISSIONER OF THE GOVERNMENT RELIEF AND REHABILITATION
COMMISSION.

THIS PREDICTION IS QUITE CONTRARY TO THE GENERAL IMPRESSION
OF THE AGENCIES AND OTHER AGRICULTURAL EXPERTS, SAID
AN INTERNATIONAL RELIEF OFFICIAL.

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PART OF THE CONTROVERSY INVOLVES ETHIOPIA'S CONTINUING
RELUCTANCE TO TAP ITS AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO DEAL WITH

WHAT MOST FOREIGN RELIEF EXPERTS FEEL ARE NOW NO MORE
THAN "POCKETS OF DROUGHT." THIS SITUATION, THEY
SAY, PROBABLY HAS ALWAYS EXISTED BUT NEVER BEFORE HAS
BEEN A CONCERN OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS OVER 300 MILLION DOLLARS IN GOLD AND
FOREIGN EXCHANGE HOLDINGS, AN ALL-TIME HIGH, AND MANY
DONOR NATIONS FEEL SOME OF THIS MONEY SHOULD BE USED
TO PURCHASE GRAIN. WHILE ETHIOPIA HAS RECEIVED 140,000
TONS OF GRAIN FREE FROM INTERNATIONAL SOURCES, IT HAS
PURCHASED ONLY 2,000 TONS FROM LOCAL COMMERCIAL MARKETS
ESTIMATED IN MAY TO HAVE 30,000 TONS IN STOCK.

FURTHERMORE, IT APPEARS THAT THE NEW RULING PROVISIONAL
MILITARY COUNCIL PLANS TO USE A GOOD PORTION OF THESE
HOLDINGS TO BUY GUNS RATHER THAN GRAIN.

RECENT REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON SAID THAT ETHIOPIA IS
PLANNING TO SPEND UPWARDS OF 100 MILLION DOLLARS TO
BUY HEAVY TANKS, AIRCRAFT AND OTHER MILITARY EQUIPMENT.
ETHIOPIA HAS A CONTINUING BORDER DISPUTE WITH SOVIET-
ARMED SOMALIA.

ANOTHER QUESTION BEING ASKED BY INTERNATIONAL DONORS
IS WHY ETHIOPIA'S EXPORTS OF GRAIN DURING THE FIRST
SIX MONTHS OF THIS YEAR HAVE MORE THAN DOUBLED OVER
THE SAME PERIOD IN 1973 FROM 5,300 TONS TO 11,000 TONS.

ASKED THESE QUESTIONS, OFFICIALS OF THE RELIEF AND
REHABILITATION COMMISSION REFUSED TO PROVIDE ANSWERS.
ONE OF THEM WAS QUOTED AS ASKING, "WHAT HAS THIS GOT
TO DO WITH THE DROUGHT?"

THE STATE-CONTROLLED MEDIA STRESSES THAT 3 TO 4 MILLION
ETHIOPIANS ARE SUFFERING IN 11 OF THE 14 PROVINCES FROM
A "WORSENING DROUGHT SITUATION." THE COMMISSION HAS
FORMALLY REQUESTED 278,000 TONS OF GRAIN FROM THE INTER-
NATIONAL COMMUNITY PLUS ANOTHER 60,000 TONS FOR A
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NATIONAL EMERGENCY STOCKPILE.

BUT FOREIGN RELIEF OFFICIALS AT THE MEETING TWO WEEKS
AGO WHERE ETHIOPIA MADE THE REQUEST SAY THEY WERE UNABLE
TO OBTAIN ANY EXPLANATION FOR HOW THE GOVERNMENT ARRIVED
AT THE 278,000-TON FIGURE, PARTICULARLY PRIOR TO KNOWING
THE RESULTS OF THE NOVEMBER HARVEST.

RELIABLE FOREIGN RELIEF SOURCES SAY THAT A REPORT
CONTRADICTING THE COMMISSION'S OFFICIAL EVALUATION

HAS BEEN SUPPRESSED. THE STUDY WAS MADE BY ROGER HAY,
BRITISH NUTRITIONAL EXPERT WORKING FOR THE COMMISSION
ON BEHALF OF THE UNITED NATIONS.

THE OFFICIAL U.S. EMBASSY POSITION IS ONE OF SUSPENDED
JUDGMENT. HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY HAS ALREADY ASKED
WASHINGTON TO RESERVE 20,000 TONS OF GRAINS FOR ETHIOPIA
IN CASE AN EMERGENCY DEVELOPS NEXT YEAR.

THE US AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT HAS DISPATCHED
SIX TEAMS TO DOZENS OF SPOTS IN EIGHT PROVINCES TO
INVESTIGATE GOVERNMENT REPORTS OF FAMINE AND DROUGHT.
AN AD HOC INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE MAJOR DONORS
IS MAKING ITS OWN STUDY.

NO FOREIGN RELIEF OFFICIAL SEEMS TO DOUBT THAT THERE ARE
STILL POCKETS OF DROUGHT. ONE IS THE DESERT AREA ALONG
THE SOMALI BORDER, WHERE THE LOCAL PRESS LAST WEEK
REPORTED THAT 96 PERSONS HAVE DIED FROM FAMINE AND WHERE
FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS SAW DOZENS OF NOMADS ON THE
VERGE OF STARVATION.

IN NORTHERN ERITREA, I FOUND ALMOST TOTAL CROP FAILURE
AROUND KEREN.

ERITREA NOW HAS ITS OWN PRIVATE RELIEF AND REHABILITA-
TION ASSOCIATION WHICH HAS PUT OUT A REPORT SAYING THAT
700,000 PERSONS ARE SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY PROLONGED
DROUGHT, COMPLICATED BY THE STATE OF WAR THAT HAS EXISTED
FOR MORE THAN A DECADE IN THE PROVINCE BECAUSE OF A
SECESSIONIST GUERRILLA MOVEMENT.

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THE ONLY OUTSIDE AGENCY TO STUDY THE DROUGHT'S EFFECTS
ON THE 2 MILLION INHABITANTS OF THE PROVINCE IS THE
INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS, WHICH MADE A SECRET AGREEMENT
WITH THE SECESSIONIST ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT AND SENT
A TEAM DEEP INTO REBEL-CONTROLLED TERRITORY IN AUGUST.
THAT REPORT IS SAID TO FIND WIDESPREAD MALNUTRITION AMONG
THE PEASANTRY.

BUT THE GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO ALLOW A RELIEF OPERATION IN
THE PROVINCE, APPARENTLY FEARING THAT THE GUERRILLAS
WOULD BENEFIT.

WHILE THE SITUATION IN KEREN AND REPORTEDLY IN A NUMBER
OF OTHER AREAS OF ERITREA IS POTENTIALLY SERIOUS BECAUSE

OF CROP FAILURES I SAW NO SIGN OF STARVATION.

FOREIGN RELIEF OFFICIALS ARE GREATLY PUZZLED AS TO WHY THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT HAS COME OUT WITH SUCH A HIGH ESTIMATE OF ITS NEEDS FOR THE COMING YEAR EVEN BEFORE THE FALL HARVEST IS IN.

RELIEF COMMISSIONER SHIMELIS CITED ATTACKS BY CATERPILLARS LOCUSTS ON CROPS IN SOME REGIONS AND SAID, "I DON'T KNOW YET BUT I WOULD RATHER ERR ON THE SAFE SIDE. IF 90,000 TONS IS ENOUGH, THEN FINE. I MADE A MISTAKE. BUT OUR DONORS HAVE A TENDENCY TO WAIT UNTIL CATASPROPHE HAS HIT.. I'LL DO ALL I CAN TO RAISE A HUE AND CRY TO PREVENT EVEN ONE PERSON FROM DYING."

ONE POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THE HIGH ETHIOPIAN GRAIN REQUEST IS THE AGRARIAN REFORM EXPECTED TO BE ANNOUNCED WITHIN SIX WEEKS.

THE THEORY HERE IS THAT THE RULING MILITARY COUNCIL IS WORRIED ABOUT A DRASTIC DROP IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT AND IS SEEKING TO BUILD UP ITS GRAIN RESERVES TO DEAL WITH POSSIBLE POPULAR DISCONTENT AND FOOD SHORTAGES AS A RESULT.
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FULL ARTICLE BEING POUCHED.

2. DEPARTMENT PREPARED PRESS GUIDANCE BUT NO QUESTIONS AROSE AT TODAY'S PRESS BRIEFING. GUIDANCE BEING POUCHED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, DISASTER RELIEF, PUBLICATIONS, DATA
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 OCT 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974STATE234846
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: GDKULICK:JR
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740304-1064
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741018/aaaaapgj.tel
Line Count: 206
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN AF
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: ADDIS ABABA 12607
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: cunninfx
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 MAR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 MAR 2002 by chappeld>; APPROVED <11 FEB 2003 by cunninfx>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE ON DROUGHT RELIEF OCTOBER 24, 1974
TAGS: EAID, ET
To: ADDIS ABABA
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005